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Citation for published version:

Griffiths, T 2019, 'Quantifying an 'essential social habit': The entertainments tax and cinema-going in Britain, 1916-34', *Film History*, vol. 31, no. 1, 1, pp. 1-26. <https://doi.org/10.2979/filmhistory.31.1.0001>

Digital Object Identifier (DOI):

[10.2979/filmhistory.31.1.0001](https://doi.org/10.2979/filmhistory.31.1.0001)

Link:

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

Document Version:

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Published In:

Film History

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Quantifying an “Essential Social Habit”: The Entertainments Tax and Cinemagoing in Britain, 1916–1934

ABSTRACT: This paper reconstructs levels of cinemagoing in Britain over the two decades preceding the first accepted estimates of the national audience, which were produced in 1934. It uses the receipts from the tax on entertainments, levied by British governments starting in 1916, to examine the impact of broader developments, from war to major economic downturns, and radical changes within the industry itself with the introduction of sound technology. A significant discontinuity is identified in the emergence of the talking picture, which worked to broaden and deepen support for the cinema, confirming it as the dominant mass entertainment form of the period.

KEYWORDS: audiences, cinema exhibitors, taxation, prices of admission, war, recession

INTRODUCTION

Cinema's dominance of commercial entertainment across Britain by the mid-1930s is well documented. An audience of 903 million in 1934, equivalent to a weekly attendance of 17.4 million, accounted for just under two-thirds (66.32 percent) of all expenditure on taxable amusements, a position that would only be strengthened further during the ensuing decade, when cinema's share of attendance and expenditure rose to 83 and 74 percent, respectively.¹ Starting with figures from the mid-1930s, the study of cinema attendance rests on secure statistical foundations. However, prior to the mid-1930s, a period that encompassed total war, two major recessions, and the technological upheaval occasioned by the advent of talking pictures, the position regarding attendance is altogether less clear. The few estimates that are available derive from occasional contemporary observations on attendance, most of which lacked supporting evidence and were often advanced to justify claims of the industry's size and importance. As a result, figures often markedly at variance could circulate

almost simultaneously. In the early 1920s, estimates of the weekly audience as divergent as 7.5 million and 40 million were aired.² In 1916–17, both A. H. Spoor of the Essanay Film Service and F. R. Goodwin of the Cinematograph Exhibitors' Association (CEA) argued for an average daily attendance across all 4,500 venues then screening moving pictures of between 3.4 and 3.6 million, generating audiences of over 20 million a week and in excess of 1 billion during the year.³ Carrying as they did the imprimatur of leading industry figures, such numbers gained broad acceptance in the trade and were presented as commonsense alternatives to more extreme claims.⁴ Among those citing attendance in excess of 20 million per week was the individual responsible for the first attempt to systematically measure attendance levels in the 1930s, Simon Rowson of the Gaumont British Picture Corporation.⁵

Rowson's initial inquiries were primarily intended to calculate amounts raised each year at cinema box offices in order to establish the proportion of proceeds from ticket sales that remained in Britain rather than leaking abroad to fill the coffers of film producers in Hollywood. Estimates of audience size were a by-product of this investigation. Rowson's initial findings, which suggested a weekly audience across Britain in 1933 of 18.5 million, were "a little less than was generally accepted as the number of admissions a few years ago" but did nothing to contradict the view that little "if any actual or appreciable change has really occurred in the last few years."⁶ As those years beginning in 1929 encompassed both a marked economic downturn and the most dramatic technological development since the advent of moving pictures themselves, this seems unlikely. Accepting both Rowson's estimates of the 1930s and Spoor and Goodwin's figures for 1916–17 has implications for understanding change across the period, as it would suggest that support for silent film exceeded that for the talkies, at least until the surge in attendance created by conditions of war and austerity during the 1940s. A narrative emerges in which cinema was the beneficiary of successive wartime bubbles, with the period between the wars being marked by persistently lower levels of support.⁷ This paper is in part directed at evaluating this view.

Doubts about the calculations of Spoor and Goodwin can be raised. An examination of patterns of opening among the 550 cinemas active across Scotland in the months following the armistice indicates a large minority operating fewer than two shows nightly throughout the six-day week, with a number offering shows on selected nights only. When considered alongside evidence of seasonal opening patterns, with many houses opting to close during the period of slack business that began in the late spring, claims of an average attendance of 750 to 800 a night across all venues in 1916–17 appear open to question.⁸ If such reflections encourage skepticism about existing estimates, they do little to

offer viable alternatives. Yet the means to do so are provided by the very series employed by Rowson to generate his estimates: the annual return of amounts raised by the entertainments tax. Levied on the price of admission to “any entertainment, exhibition, performance, games and sport, to which or to view which, persons are admitted on payment,” the tax was introduced in the budget of April 1916 and began to be applied in the following month.⁹ A continuous run of numbers exists, set out in table 1, enabling us to estimate changes in support

Table 1: Amounts raised by Entertainments Tax, 1916–1939

Tax Year	Amount Raised (£)
1916–17	2,917,871
1917–18	4,843,976*
1918–19	7,325,063
1919–20	10,210,360
1920–21	11,504,976
1921–22	10,086,479
1922–23	9,603,047
1923–24	9,284,686
1924–25	6,249,344*
1925–26	5,714,476
1926–27	5,729,054
1927–28	6,119,978
1928–29	6,003,587
1929–30	6,695,847
1930–31	6,952,088
1931–32	7,868,908*
1932–33	9,318,622
1933–34	9,235,160
1934–35	9,724,280
1935–36	7,806,080*
1936–37	7,572,281
1937–38	7,985,071
1938–39	8,153,771

Note: Figures relate to Great Britain only and exclude Northern Ireland. The period 1916–17 covers May 16, 1916, to March 31, 1917. Figures reflect current prices.

*Figures are affected by major changes in tax rates, precluding the presentation of the series in graph form, which would offer a misleading impression of trends.

for the industry across two crucial but less than fully documented decades, potentially extending statistical coverage to within seven years of the building boom that established cinema as a distinct entertainment form.¹⁰

Reaching estimates of audience numbers requires us to follow Rowson's basic method: isolating cinema's share of the total tax take, identifying the relationship between the amount paid in duty and the overall price of admission, then applying the resultant multiplier to the amount raised in tax at cinemas to establish the total sum spent on cinemagoing. Dividing that box-office figure by the average ticket price, inclusive of tax, yields the total audience.¹¹ Making these estimates affords insights into cinema's place within the overall choice of entertainments and the pricing policies adopted by the industry in response to changing economic and political circumstances. As will be seen, our calculations rest on often incomplete information, impeding any claims for the precision of the audience figures that result. Given that they ultimately derive from officially gathered statistics, they do however help to define the boundaries of plausibility, enabling a more realistic appraisal of the development of both industry and audience during this formative period, one at times markedly at variance with that offered in many existing accounts. Before that can be outlined with any conviction, however, challenges posed by changes in each of the variables that inform Rowson's calculations must be confronted.

ESTIMATING CINEMA'S CONTRIBUTION TO TAX RECEIPTS

The method of collection adopted for the tax makes identifying the contribution cinema made to the aggregate returns far from straightforward. When first broached in the winter of 1915–16, the tax was envisaged as a stamp duty, with the amount payable on top of the basic (exclusive) admission price indicated by means of a stamp affixed to the proprietors' own tickets, the value of the stamp varying with the cost of admission. Alternatively, a government ticket could be used, on which was printed the price exclusive of duty and the tax payable. Stamps or tickets were purchased in advance from local customs offices, the sums expended being redeemed through subsequent admissions.¹² While the local customs and excise offices had information on the number of stamps and tickets sold at specific values, the nature of the entertainment for which they had been intended remained unknown, a deficiency that would persist through the period under review. However, as proposals for the tax crystallized in the spring of 1916, the industry pressed for an alternative means of collection, minimizing delays caused by the issuing of stamps or tickets to large numbers seeking admission immediately before the scheduled start of an event. Many larger venues already had means of recording admissions, from turnstiles to machines that issued metal discs on entrance. The proprietors

of such venues made the case that these could provide the basis of returns to the tax authorities on admissions at particular prices. Subject to independent verification by means of certificates provided by chartered accountants, these certified returns became the preferred means of submitting returns by many enterprises.¹³

The certified returns accounted for a rising proportion of tax receipts across the period, increasing from 60 percent of the total take in 1916–17 to over 81 percent of the total raised by cinemas alone in 1934, and provide the only means of linking the tax revenue to specific forms of entertainment.¹⁴ The absence of such details for business conducted by stamps and tickets would justify successive governments' refusal to provide information on the contribution of specific amusements to the overall tax take. Even questions raised in Parliament, which attempted to confine coverage to the businesses employing certified returns, were rebuffed on the grounds that so many businesses used the stamp and ticket systems that any breakdown would have no practical value.¹⁵ Only starting in 1935, when all admissions of 6d., or sixpence, and under (each penny representing one twelfth of a shilling and one two hundred and fortieth part of a pound), the bulk of which were recorded through stamps and tickets, were taken out of tax, was the government prepared to cite the certified returns to capture the comparative contributions of the different entertainment media.¹⁶

Figures covering a three-month period to the end of November 1935 indicated that 67 percent of the receipts from certified returns were traceable to the cinema, compared to 15 percent from other leading indoor entertainments—the theater and music hall. The contributions of other forms of amusement making up the remainder, predominantly sports, were not specified.¹⁷ An instructive point of contrast is provided by estimates of amounts raised by certified returns collated by the Commissioners of Customs and Excise for the tax year 1920–21, which put the shares of cinema and theater/music hall at 36.63 and 46.4 percent, respectively.¹⁸ Although the magnitude of change is somewhat overstated by a further tax change in 1935 that reduced rates on live theatrical entertainments, a marked shift in favor of the cinema is still suggested.

To gauge its extent more accurately, the business generated at venues using stamps and tickets must be factored in. No breakdown of noncertified returns is available at any point in the period starting in 1916–17. The closest we have are the figures for entertainments not subject to tax in 1937–38, which indicate a 62.6 to 37.4 division between cinematic and noncinematic entertainments.¹⁹ These cover seats priced 6d. and below that were exempted from the tax starting in 1935, which were more likely than not to have been subject to noncertified methods of revenue raising. What is more, the proportion of all

entertainments expenditure they represented in 1937–38, 20.6 percent, is close to the 18.75 percent that businesses employing stamps and tickets contributed to the total raised by cinemas in 1934.²⁰ In the absence of any alternative measure, the calculations that follow assumed that noncertified returns were divided 62.6 to 37.4 in the cinema's favor through the period starting in 1916. If precision cannot be claimed for such an estimate, it has the virtue of acknowledging the preponderance of cinema among the cheaper amusements, while apportioning a share to other leisure entrepreneurs drawn in to tax during and immediately after the First World War. Adding noncertified to certified returns produces a weighting for cinema of 47.4 percent of total tax receipts in 1920–21, still considerably below the share of 66.32 percent in 1934.²¹ A marked shift in the pattern of spending on taxable amusements over the intervening years is indicated.

The question remains at what point this major shift in the balance of the certified returns toward the cinema and away from live entertainments occurred. Although a sustained and gradual change in cinema's share of tax receipts starting in the early 1920s cannot be ruled out, it is rendered less likely by the impact of technological change toward the end of that decade. Indeed, internal debates within the theater trade suggest that any erosion of market share in the years before 1929 was rarely ascribed to the cinema. Rather, attention appears to have been devoted by representatives of the theatrical trade to the perceived threat from cabarets—entertainments offered by restaurants that, because they complemented the principal attraction, the food on offer, were not subject to tax.²² More often, throughout the 1920s, cinema and theater interests acted in tandem in the campaign against the tax waged by the Entertainments Tax Abolition League. Unity was maintained, so that the CEA was represented at mass meetings called by the abolition league in advance of the 1929 budget.²³ From that point, a tendency to see the cinema as the main threat to the theater's continuing viability becomes evident, a viewpoint articulated in September 1930 by Oswald Stoll on "The Human Theatre and the Mechanical." Stoll's argument centered on the impact of the talkies, which by offering a product broadly comparable to the theater, albeit at the markedly cheaper prices allowed by lower production costs, had transformed the market.²⁴ Two branches of the entertainment industry that had, to that point, been largely discrete now inhabited similar ground, literally, as reports emerged of buildings intended for live entertainment being altered to accommodate the talking picture. In May 1930, a mere five weeks after opening, the Prince Edward Theatre in Soho was undergoing wiring for sound, while the Broadhead group, based in Manchester, was reported to be in the process of converting four of its theaters to cinemas.²⁵ From this point, the theater pursued its own tax campaign discretely through the Stage and Allied Arts Defence League, seeking a lower rate of duty on amusements that primarily depended

on the presence of live performers.²⁶ This move to seek protection from the encroachments on market share originating with the talkies suggests that the shift in expenditure patterns reflected in the changing proportion of tax receipts, rather than being consistent across the period beginning in the early 1920s, may have occurred substantially in the years of transition from silent to sound film.

Some sense of the impact this may have had on audience size is conveyed by offering two estimates of cinema's share of overall tax receipts for the period from 1929 to 1932: a higher one based on the weighting given to the cinema by Stone and Rowe (66.32 percent), and a lower one that carries forward the shares observed in the early 1920s. This latter figure was subject to changes over the decade. The first followed the abolition of tax on seats priced 6d. and below starting in 1924, which had the effect of reducing the industry's share of tax receipts to 36.63 percent.²⁷ The second came at the end of the decade. After some years of comparative stability in the tax take, a marked increase was recorded in consecutive years 1929–30 and 1930–31, in both of which tax rates remained unchanged, of £948,501, or 15.8 percent.²⁸ This was all the more notable, coming as it did in a period of mounting economic difficulty. In his 1930 budget speech, Philip Snowden drew attention to the stark contrast between the income from customs and excise duties overall, which fell short of estimates by some £3,012,000, and the entertainments tax, which exceeded the anticipated yield by over £500,000, a divergence that he believed was traceable primarily to “the boom in talking films.”²⁹ For those within the trade, it was manifest that sound films had “captured the imagination of the public to a much greater extent than was ever anticipated by their sponsors.”³⁰ To reflect the significance of sound, our calculations assign all of the growth in tax revenues in the years 1929–30 and 1930–31 to the cinema. The effect is to raise the cinema's share of the total by the latter year to 45.3 percent.

This still does not account for the seats exempted from tax in 1924 that would not come within the scope of official records again until November 1931, when the duty was once more extended to admissions priced 6d. and below.³¹ In the absence of precise documentation, the calculations presented here are based on the assumption that between 1924 and 1929 nontaxed attendance (which according to customs and excise estimates of ticket sales by price accounted for just short of 60 percent of cinema admissions³²) varied in line with those still subject to duty, an approach that business records appear to validate. Small halls in mining districts struggled during the prolonged coal stoppage of 1926, with roughly one hundred obliged to close for extended periods.³³ Thereafter, reduced spending power rendered business increasingly precarious. Even away from mining areas, there is little evidence of a widespread surge in patronage among seats of 6d. and below. In Aberdeen, two halls in the east of the city, the

Star and Globe picture houses, which collected only nominal amounts of tax after 1924, respectively recorded falling receipts across the later 1920s and growth of just short of 10 percent.³⁴

With the coming of sound, the assumption informing our calculations that taxed and nontaxed seats followed the same trend cannot be sustained beyond 1929. By the end of 1929, only a minority of halls across Britain had undergone wiring.³⁵ Western Electric, the largest supplier of sound equipment, claimed just over three hundred installations by December of that year, while a survey by the CEA indicated that, while most houses intended to re-equip for sound, they had yet to begin the process.³⁶ Twelve months later, the trade paper *Film Weekly* estimated that only six hundred silent cinemas remained, concluding that “the talkie revolution in England [*sic*] is almost complete.”³⁷ Our calculations, therefore, assumed that the increase in spending induced by the talkies remained confined in 1929–30 to a pioneering minority, so that nontaxed seats were allocated no gains from increased expenditure. This overlooks that some seats not subject to tax were in cinemas that undertook conversion at an early date. Nevertheless, the bulk of the seats exempted from tax in 1924 were in smaller houses where the transition was delayed. By 1930–31, the talkies’ ubiquity justified extending the rise in expenditure to the nontaxed seats also.

The final stage in estimating cinema’s importance within entertainment expenditure across the period involves extending our coverage back to the years of the Great War. Considerable uncertainty surrounded the industry’s prospects at the outbreak of war in August 1914. Some exhibitors anticipated closure, as the supply of film from the United States appeared uncertain, and a combination of reduced activity and the demands of military recruitment threatened to seriously deplete attendance.³⁸ In the end, such fears proved unfounded. In some areas, employment on government contracts more than compensated for reduced business, while the stationing of troops locally was usually seen as a guarantee of full houses.³⁹ Yet, even where industrial conditions remained unpromising, as across the Lancashire cotton districts, business was still reported to be buoyant.⁴⁰ In such cases, the payment of separation allowances to dependents provided a guaranteed income to those, primarily women and children, who were cinema’s most devoted supporters, ensuring the industry a sizeable and loyal constituency.⁴¹ An optimistic tone thus permeated the trade press, given statistical underpinning by company balance sheets that reported profits broadly in line with or even exceeding prewar margins.⁴² As the first anniversary of the outbreak of war approached, the prevailing impression was of “Picture Theatres Booming.”⁴³ Indeed, the entertainments tax originated in part from the perception that popular expenditure on moving pictures particularly remained unchecked by any broader sense of national emergency.⁴⁴ It therefore

seems justifiable to assume that spending on moving pictures was not unduly depressed as a consequence of war.

Other indoor amusements also appear to have prospered in this period. Metropolitan theaters were attracting new audiences of working women and servicemen on leave, while trade publications reported that touring companies “enjoyed well-won prosperity.”⁴⁵ Dividend payments used as measures of profitability indicate that most of the larger theatrical undertakings appear at least to have maintained prewar rates of return in the years after 1914.⁴⁶ Here again, no significant diminution in theater business was assumed. A more obvious casualty of war was sports. Continued competition, which engaged the energies of those most suited by gender, age, and fitness for military service, was deemed unacceptable, so that many activities were suspended for the duration of the conflict.⁴⁷ Some popular spectator sports were maintained, justifying their continuance by their contribution to morale, but increasingly operated on a severely reduced basis. In England, the Football League suspended national competition beginning in 1915, instead organizing competitions along regional lines, thereby limiting travel needs. League structures endured in Scotland, albeit latterly without teams beyond the central belt.⁴⁸ Overall, regional groupings struggled to excite widespread interest, and club accounts charted reduced levels of support. One of the most successful sides in the league’s northern group, Manchester City, recorded receipts of £5,618 and £5,278 in the seasons 1916–17 and 1917–18, contributing £824 and £1,127 respectively to the entertainments tax take.⁴⁹ By contrast, in the first full postwar season, the club reported figures of £31,364 and £8,649 under each heading.⁵⁰ Overall, the Football League’s midland section raised £7,153 10s. 1d. in duty over four months ending in January 1919, compared with the £62,748 raised by the Moss’s Empire chain of theaters between the introduction of the tax and the end of 1916, a period of just over seven months.⁵¹ Compared to the postwar period, sport’s contribution to tax receipts was marginal. In the absence of direct evidence on the extent of the difference, it was assumed that the share of revenue generated by the major spectator sports of football, horse racing, and cricket, which customs and excise figures for certified returns in the first postwar tax year, 1919–20, put at 6.44 percent, was effectively zero for the final two years of the war. With sport eliminated from the mix, the tax raised at cinemas was then calculated as a share of the smaller total.⁵² Once allowance is made for cinema’s lower share of certified returns in 1919–20, its share of overall tax receipts decreased to 44.75 percent. This had the effect of raising cinema’s weighting in the preceding years to 47.8 percent.⁵³

There remain the amusements rather unhelpfully grouped by customs and excise under the general label Other. Some reduction in activity could be anticipated, as many annual events, staples of the local calendar, from agricultural

shows to pleasure fairs, were suspended.⁵⁴ Many, however, endured, encouraging the agents of the customs and excise offices to pursue contraventions of tax regulations by a still active population of travelling show people. In 1916, an action was brought at Barnstaple Petty Sessions against “Prince Samouda,” described as a “well-known coloured entertainer,” charged with defrauding the Exchequer of 0.5d. tax per ticket.⁵⁵ Other cases turned on the problems itinerant entertainers faced in acquiring stamps or government tickets.⁵⁶ If the Other category of entertainments experienced shrinkage during wartime, the extent of decline cannot be documented with confidence, so that any attempt to assign a lower weighting to this group would be arbitrary. The calculations outlined here assumed that the Other category was unaffected by wartime conditions. If this overstates activity in this sector, it compensates in some degree for any underrecording of sport in wartime.

Table 2 summarizes the various estimates offered above, showing the proportions of the total tax take ascribed to the cinema over the period 1916 to 1935.

Table 2: Cinema’s share of taxable expenditure on entertainments, 1916–1935

Tax Year		Share (%)	
From	To		
1916–17	1918–19	47.8	
1919–20		44.75	
1920–21	1923–24	47.34	
1924–25	1928–29	36.63	
		Lower	Higher
1929–30		43.18	66.32
1930–31		45.27	66.32
1931–32 (seven months)		45.27	66.32
1931–32 (five months)	1934–35		66.32

TAX RATES AND THE AVERAGE PRICE OF ADMISSION

The next stage in the calculations involved estimating the weight of the tax in the inclusive price of admission. For 1934, Rowson found that the tax accounted for an average of 16.67 percent of the ticket price, reflecting Snowden’s intention, outlined in his September 1931 budget, that the tax bear as far as was practicable a uniform weight across the price range of one-sixth of the admission charge.⁵⁷

In terms of price, Rowson calculated the average at 10.26d., a figure later adjusted upward to 10.33d.⁵⁸ Points of comparison elsewhere within the period are provided by analyses of ticket sales by customs and excise officials in 1916–17 and 1923–24. The first presents an annualized estimate from ticket sales over the quarter from October to December 1916. The coverage was incomplete, with only admissions registered via sales of government tickets and stamps categorized by price. Certified returns, by contrast, yielded only aggregate data, obliging officials to assume that the distribution of ticket sales in this category by price mirrored those for noncertified receipts. While some distortion was acknowledged, its effect was judged marginal. Combined, the certified stamp and government ticket returns provide total admissions and the total tax take at each price level. From this, it is possible to calculate aggregate box-office receipts at each price ([tax + admission price] x ticket sales). If attention is confined to those seats that cost 1s. and under, some approximation to the position in cinemas may be obtained, as this price range was judged by customs and excise to encompass all but the most expensive West End picture palaces. For these admissions, the tax was found to make up on average 18.7 percent of the inclusive price (tax receipts / box-office receipts), while dividing the box-office receipts by the number of tickets sold produced an average price of 4.8d.⁵⁹ Responding to what was judged a disappointing yield for the year, the 1917 budget raised the overall weight of the duty. Utilizing the 1916–17 distribution of admissions by price suggests that the increase, which applied starting in October, raised the tax to 23.3 percent of the inclusive price, and the average price to just over 5d.⁶⁰

Amendments allowing exhibitors to retain a greater proportion of the inclusive price at 3d. (from August 1918) and 6d. (October 1919) reduced the overall weight of the tax, so that by the time of the second ticket survey, early in 1924, it was found to account for 20.7 percent of inclusive prices. By then, the average inclusive charge calculated across a range of seat prices equivalent to that employed by Rowson in 1934 stood at 9.67d., a marked increase on the figure for 1918.⁶¹ During the war, trade papers had argued for the necessity of raising admission charges to address the problem of mounting costs, primarily for film hire and wages, and to enable the industry to shed any reputation for offering entertainment that in all senses of the word could be deemed cheap.⁶² If the onset of the tax in 1916 delayed any adjustment, by 1918, buoyed by the conviction that increases enforced by taxation had not deterred patrons, exhibitors finally moved to raise prices. Reports that cinemas in Glasgow and Aberdeen had taken the lead in implementing change impressed the chancellor, Bonar Law, who invoked local knowledge to observe to a CEA deputation in May 1918, “Well now, if Aberdeen is prepared to pay extra, there is no part of the kingdom, in my opinion, that is not prepared to pay.”⁶³ In the months on either side of the armistice, the trade press

recorded widespread movement on prices, so that by August 1919, exhibitors in Bonar Law’s bellwether city of Aberdeen had agreed to a doubling of minimum prices to 4d.⁶⁴ In individual instances, the increase in charges was marked, so that by 1920 at one hall in North Shields, the cost of admission to various parts of the house had risen by between 25 and 80 percent, while at the town hall in the Scottish burgh of Kirkintilloch, the business run by the local council raised prices over three years by between 50 and 100 percent.⁶⁵ The most substantial change in the cost of cinemagoing in the period before the Second World War had been effected, so that by 1920–21, average prices exceeded 10d. In practice, however, moves to coordinate price adjustments often failed to secure unanimous support, justifying the treasury’s assessment in 1918 that “the Cinema trade is notoriously not organized.”⁶⁶ With changes decided largely on a local and piecemeal basis, our ability to precisely capture the extent of price increases in the years 1918–19 and 1919–20 was compromised. To address this, two calculations were attempted: the first assumed that price increases were spread evenly over the three years starting in 1917–18, the second allowed for an accelerated rate of increase, divided equally over the two years to 1919–20 (see table 3).

Table 3: Hypothetical price adjustments and their impact on attendance

Three-stage price increase, 1918–19 to 1920–21		
Year	Average Price	Audience
1916–17	4.82d.	373 million
1917–18	4.96d.	540 million
1918–19	6.81d.	596 million
1919–20	8.66d.	612 million
1920–21	10.5d.	601 million
Two-stage price increase, 1918–19 to 1919–20		
Year	Average Price	Audience
1916–17	4.82d.	373 million
1917–18	4.96d.	540 million
1918–19	7.73d.	525 million
1919–20	10.5d.	504 million
1920–21	10.5d.	601 million

The two-stage price increase generated falling attendance after 1918, at odds with the prevailing sense of prosperity across the trade. A three-stage increase would seem to offer a more realistic picture of trends across these years and was the estimate adopted for the final series presented in table 5.

A comparison of pricing structures across time suggests that the most significant changes centered on the early postwar years (see table 4).

Table 4: Proportion of ticket sales by price, 1916–34 (%)

Inclusive Price	1916–17	1924	1934
To 2.5d.	32.08	10.55	5.32
2.5d. to 5d.	36.9	19.66	8.49
5d. to 7d.	22.15	5.7	18.38
7d. to 11d.	2.47	32.56	37.15
11d. to 1s. 2d.	3.85	10.45	15.05
1s. 2d. to 1s. 5d.	0.3	0.57	0
1s. 5d. to 1s. 8d.	0.79	1.67	0.42
1s. 8d. to 2s. 2d.	0.49	3.99	2.64
2s. 2d. to 2s. 8d.	0.43	0.76	1.81
above 2s. 8d.	0.55	0.76	0.68

By contrast, the shift to new technology generated no comparable adjustment. Indeed, debate within the trade press at the time focused more on the prospect of price reductions than on any organized move to increase charges. The problem of low prices appeared especially acute in heavy industrial districts, so that in March 1930, a survey across the city of Sheffield found that in thirty-one out of forty houses, seats were available for below 6d. each.⁶⁷ Price increases were discouraged by the squeeze on spending power at a time of rising unemployment and the competition from nontaxed entertainments, such as the dance hall.⁶⁸ Pressures within the trade also intensified as new talkie houses opened, precluding unity on prices. In August 1929, the Albion Cinema in North Shields adjusted admission charges, taking them close to the level operative at the industry's postwar peak in the early 1920s. Yet this proved difficult to maintain when another talkie hall opened in 1930.⁶⁹ The reimposition of the tax on seats priced 6d. and below late in 1931 faced exhibitors with a choice, whether or not to pass the tax on to patrons in increased prices. With adherence to any collective line increasingly unlikely, many opted to hold charges steady, effectively paying the tax themselves, at a time when the anticipated price elasticity of demand was high.⁷⁰ The finding that prices remained broadly stable has further implications for the rise in entertainments tax revenue after 1929, suggesting that it was primarily a consequence of growth in business.

It will be noted that the figures for average prices set out in table 5 are not static but move in proportion to the average price estimated for entertainments as a whole by Stone and Rowe.⁷¹ This reflects the tendency for the average to drift upward or downward as patrons opted for higher or lower priced seating. Between 1925 and 1927, the average price charged by the Provincial Cinematograph Theatres Ltd. rose from 11.75d. to 1s. 0.25d., without any formal adjustment to exclusive rates.⁷²

Table 5: Cinema admissions, 1916–34, indicated by entertainments tax returns

Year	Cinema Share (%)	Multiplier	Avg. Price (d.)	Admissions
1916–17	47.8	5.35	4.82	373 million
1917–18	47.8	4.82	4.96	540 million
1918–19	47.8	4.82	6.8	596 million
191920	44.75	4.83	8.7	612 million
1920–21	47.34	4.83	10.5	601 million
1921–22	47.34	4.83	10.11	547 million
1922–23	47.34	4.83	9.76	540 million
1923–24	47.34	4.83	9.67	527 million
1924–25	36.63	6.41	13.2*	586 million
1925–26	36.63	6.41	13.48	581 million
1926–27	36.63	6.41	13.86	567 million
1927–28	36.63	6.41	14.11	595 million
1928–29	36.63	6.41	13.86	594 million
1929–30 (low)	43.18	6.41	13.61	677 million
1929–30 (high)	66.32	6.41	13.61	852 million
1930–31 (low)	45.27	6.41	13.36	763 million
1930–31 (high)	66.23	6.41	13.36	932 million
1931–32	66.32	6.24	12.21	887 million
1932–33	66.32	6	10.6	840 million
1933–34	66.32	6	10.4	848 million
1934–35	66.32	6	10.3	902 million

Note: figures for 1916–17 are for May 16, 1916, to March 31, 1917. *The higher average price results from the lifting of the tax on cheaper seats (6d. and below) in the 1924 budget.

THE CINEMA AUDIENCE, 1916–1934

The remainder of this paper explores the interpretive framework suggested by the figures presented in table 5. By these estimates, it is clear that at no stage before the outbreak of the Second World War did the annual cinema audience match the estimate of one billion admissions, first advanced by Spoor, and that if anything the figure of over 900 million in 1934, which Rowson considered below expectations, may have represented a high point to that date in popular engagement with the moving image.⁷³ That figure followed a surge in spending on entertainment and a coincident shift in patronage toward the cinema as film included speaking for the first time. That it may have been matched or even exceeded some twenty years earlier seems, in the light of the compelling evidence provided by the tax data, barely credible. Indeed, customs and excise's own estimates suggest that admissions to all taxable entertainments during the financial year 1916–17 did not exceed 870 million, with cinema attendance barely exceeding 8 million a week.⁷⁴

That said, there are grounds for thinking that the returns from 1916–17 were unusually low, as they fell short of what some considered a modest estimate by government of a likely tax yield of £5 million, coming in instead at £3.3 million for the full financial year.⁷⁵ For many, the problem was traceable to the duty itself. Within weeks of its introduction, the tax was being blamed for a marked downturn in business beyond that normally expected in the summer months. By the end of July 1916, an editorial in *The Bioscope* was clear that “the factor which has definitely tilted the scale from profit to loss is the Amusement Tax.”⁷⁶ Widespread closures, involving an estimated thousand houses across the country, were adduced in support of such claims.⁷⁷ Yet other factors were seen to have exacerbated the tax's impact. Its introduction coincided with the onset of the trade's slack summer period, when many houses deemed it less costly to close than to continue operations, and these inflated the reported casualty figures from the tax.⁷⁸ Anticipated seasonal variations were further intensified by a period of unusually good weather and the introduction of daylight saving time, which, by allowing an extra hour's daylight each evening, advantaged outdoor activities. In identifying the challenges confronting the trade, many gave greater weight to British summer time than to any increase in the cost of admission.⁷⁹ Nevertheless, as seemingly the most remediable of difficulties, the tax remained the principal cause for complaint within the industry.

The government's response to the lower than anticipated returns was to raise rates on most ticket prices. The impact of any increase in prices was to a degree moderated by delaying their introduction until October 1917, a point in the year when the return to Greenwich mean time and darker nights held out

the promise of greater business.⁸⁰ Nevertheless, a survey by *The Era* newspaper of over nine hundred places of entertainment found that the expected autumn uplift had not occurred and that receipts over the first four weeks of the new rates were down by over 20 percent.⁸¹ When put before treasury officials, however, such results were deemed transitory and unrepresentative. Instead, the observations of local tax officials, the comments of the trade press, and trends in certified returns from industrial centers across the country painted an altogether more optimistic picture.⁸² Assisted in part by the effects of more efficient administration, as local police were deployed to provide regular inspections of places of entertainment, yields were boosted by unmistakable indications in the spring of 1918 that “the entertaining business [was] on a high wave of prosperity.”⁸³ Returns in January 1918 for twenty-five towns showed annual growth in box-office receipts exclusive of tax of between 1 and 79 percent. In sixteen towns, the increase was in excess of 20 percent.⁸⁴ The final tax returns suggest this increase was not untypical. Adjusting the figure for 1916–17 to reflect the take across a full financial year and allowing for growth in receipts arising from the imposition of higher rates, estimated by customs and excise at £500,000 for the six months starting in October 1917, the yield for 1917–18 exceeded expectations by some 21 percent.⁸⁵ In the absence of any concerted move to raise exclusive prices, such figures point to a marked upswing in patronage. Although the extent of the increase is suggestive of a rebound from depressed activity in 1916–17, indications are that by the final year of the war, the cinema audience had reached new heights.⁸⁶

Trading success continued into the immediate postwar period, with company balance sheets offering the clearest indications of enduring prosperity. For Provincial Cinematograph Theatres, trading profits reached £224, 913 in the twelve months to the end of January 1921.⁸⁷ At the same time, shareholders benefited from enhanced dividend payments. In Scotland, the newly reconstituted BB Pictures (1920) Ltd. paid 25 percent in the twelve months to the end of October 1920, while further north the Aberdeen Picture Palaces Ltd. made disbursements equivalent to a 90 percent dividend that same year.⁸⁸ Such returns gave material substance to the description of cinemas by one candidate for municipal honors in Dundee as “veritable Klondykes.”⁸⁹ Yet the precise nature of this boom merits closer examination. The boost to receipt, which saw the income of the Albion Cinema, North Shields, rise by 66 percent between 1918 and 1921, appeared more the result of higher charges at the box office than a surge in patronage.⁹⁰ Overall, while prices more than doubled over the three years starting in 1917–18, the audience, by the most plausible measure, increased over the same period by upward of 13 percent. The suggestion that the first significant upward revision in prices had not induced any fall in

admissions is, however, telling. While reflective of higher levels of disposable income, as wages more than kept pace with price inflation following the armistice, the figures also capture the deep attachment cinemagoers now felt for their favored mode of entertainment, which an enhanced cost of attendance did nothing to weaken. Figures within the trade had frequently asserted the growing importance of the picture house in national life: "As a means of relief from the strain and stress with which the whole population is now suffering, . . . , as an antidote to unrest . . . , and as an educational factor its usefulness is being more and more realised and utilised everyday."⁹¹ The tax returns gave such claims substance: for large parts of the population, the cinema had become an indispensable part of their lives.

For all that, cinemagoing remained vulnerable to any prolonged squeeze on discretionary spending. Recession in the early 1920s hit hardest in cinema's urban, industrial heartland, so that over the three years beginning in 1923–24, receipts at the Albion Cinema fell by over 30 percent and by almost half at the Dunfermline Cinema House.⁹² The aggregated figures suggest a more modest fall in attendances overall of just over 16 percent, still sufficient to wipe out post-war gains and the first sustained fall in support experienced by the industry. The campaign against the tax, muted during the Klondyke years, was resumed starting in 1921, culminating in Snowden's reform in favor of the cheaper seats in 1924. From that point on, recovery, slow and uneven, set in, its limited extent indicated by the fact that by cinema's last fully silent year, admissions had still to regain their postwar peak.⁹³

Any marked discontinuity in attendance levels awaited technological change. Contemporary comments communicate an awareness of underlying trends. Within a year of the first talkie being shown, *Kinematograph Weekly* noted that sound had generated a new audience for the moving picture, with the promise of further growth to come: it was "the harvest ready to be gathered."⁹⁴ By late 1930, an increase in patronage of some 25 percent was being claimed.⁹⁵ Rowson, having cited a weekly attendance of 20 million in 1927, now placed the number of cinemagoers at 25 to 30 million a week.⁹⁶ His observations were taken up by the Exhibitors' Association which, in its attempt to press the case against the tax, claimed a peak annual attendance, prior to the extension of the duty following the September 1931 budget, of some 1.3 billion.⁹⁷ If the tax returns suggest that this represents a considerable overstatement of audience size at this point, they broadly endorse the argument for a substantial increase in the cinemagoing population starting in 1929. Taken in isolation, the boost to tax receipts over the two years beginning in March 1929 was capable of generating a rise in admissions of some 28.5 percent. When the transfer of patronage from the theater to the cinema is factored in, this had the potential to produce an

audience in excess of 930 million by 1930–31.⁹⁸ This assumes that the process of substituting what Stoll referred to as mechanical for live performance was completed by this date, an improbably rapid transition, and so this figure should be regarded as representing the highest extent of any possible gains during the first years of sound.

This observation colors our interpretation of the impact of the downturn in business, which contemporary comments and tax data agree set in around 1931. Exhibitors, while acknowledging the trade's relative immunity from the immediate effects of recession, pointed to increasing difficulty, especially beginning in the autumn of that year. This was traced to the tighter fiscal regime imposed following the financial crisis of late summer, which resulted in cuts in public sector pay and, crucially for much afternoon business, state benefits such as the dole.⁹⁹ Reductions in spending power, coincident with an increase in tax, worked, it was argued, to depress receipts and admissions. Returns from individual districts charted dramatic falls in business, so that early in 1932, receipts were reported to be down by between 25 and 45 percent, while the slump in attendance was said to have reached 44 percent in some halls in working-class districts.¹⁰⁰ When aggregated, any fall, while still marked, appeared less dramatic. The CEA reported audiences 13 percent down in the early months of 1932.¹⁰¹ Yet credence should not be given readily to such figures, often based on returns furnished by a small minority of exhibitors.¹⁰² Not for the first time, the association's claims were open to challenge on the grounds that they failed to represent the overall picture accurately. The tax returns provide further cause to doubt. The CEA estimated that the fall in business throughout the winter of 1931–32 had reduced admissions to the equivalent of 1.14 billion a year (down 15 percent from the peak).¹⁰³ Yet such an attendance would, applying the figures for average seat prices and the tax's share of inclusive prices for that year, have required that the cinema generate 90 percent of total receipts from the entertainments tax, compared to the 66.32 percent share observed in 1934.

The figures presented here outline more modest losses, amounting to just short of 10 percent from the peak of 1930–31 to the low point of 1932–33. Even this rests on acceptance of a figure that may by some margin overstate the audience for 1930–31, so that the impact of the downturn may have been more limited than these figures suggest.¹⁰⁴ What seems clear, however, is that the slump faced by exhibitors was less severe and less sustained than that of the early 1920s. Various explanations may be offered for this contrast. Cinema's gains at the expense of the theater may have worked to offset any falloff among more established patrons. A broader social base, in particular a larger suburban audience, offered greater security against the effects of any economic

downturn. What is more, it appears that beginning in 1931 exhibitors attempted to minimize the impact of the tax increase. Rather than passing it on, adding to the cost of admission, as had been the norm in the inflationary teens, a period also when the price elasticity of demand was observed to be lower, a sizeable minority of businesses, some two thousand by one estimate, declined to raise seat prices.¹⁰⁵ Even Neville Chamberlain, in his 1935 budget speech, acknowledged that Snowden's aim of making cinemagoers pay the increased tax, thus ensuring that all contributed to addressing the financial crisis, had not been achieved in practice.¹⁰⁶ Businesses thus sacrificed box-office income, ensuring in the process that any fall in admissions in the early 1930s was both shallow and brief. With prices static or falling across the 1930s, recovery in company balance sheets proved more protracted, and it would take the boost to cinemagoing during the Second World War to restore the exhibition sector to the kind of consistently profitable state it had last enjoyed in the late silent era.¹⁰⁷

CONCLUSION

In concluding, we are obliged, rather like the cinemagoer emerging from a darkened auditorium into daylight outside, to adjust to wider realities. Our preoccupation here has been with a range of activities, public entertainments, which in 1938 accounted for only 1.5 percent of total consumer expenditure. In aggregate terms, growth in this category of spending appeared modest, with amounts expended, as measured in current prices, up 4.1 percent starting in 1920 and an audience that was 17 percent larger by the end of the period.¹⁰⁸ Yet, as the discussion above has attempted to establish, such figures conceal important underlying changes, both quantitative and qualitative, in the market for mass amusements as a whole and the cinema in particular. Debate surrounding the entertainments tax helps to clarify both developments. In 1916, the tax was contemplated as a levy on cinemagoing, its value residing in its ability to tap spending by a public which, because of age and gender, made a limited contribution to government revenues. In part, such thinking helped to justify the markedly regressive nature of the tax as originally drafted, with higher rates imposed on the cheaper seats (33.3 percent on seats priced 1d. and 3d. in 1916–17).¹⁰⁹ By the 1930s, however, the proportion of the inclusive price that went to the tax was more uniform across a range of prices (3d. seats bore a tax of 16.7 percent, compared to a peak rate of 21 percent), and drew on the spending power of a wider public. Any distinction between those who did and did not attend the pictures had become less clear by the mid-1930s so that by the final prewar years, cinemagoing could with justification be seen as “the essential social habit of the age.”¹¹⁰

Yet for many this was also a recently acquired habit, a point which analysis of the entertainments tax helps to clarify. In tracing trends in audience levels, the tax proves a sure-footed if not fully comprehensive guide. In particular, it provides solid justification for rejecting estimates advanced by contemporaries and cited with varying degrees of conviction in later literature, whose acceptance rests more on the frequency with which they have been reiterated than on their grounding in fact. As outlined here, the tax returns generate numbers that are markedly lower than those which have been advanced previously. For all that, they also indicate that the first phase of cinema's growth as a discrete medium of mass entertainment, before and during World War I, produced a distinct and loyal picture-going public, one which would not be deterred from following its favored recreational pursuit even when the cost of so doing rose markedly. Tax returns also identify the coming of sound as the major discontinuity in the period from 1916 to 1934. There was a tendency among contemporaries to question the impact of technological change, pointing to aesthetic limitations in the end product and the indifference of individual picture-goers.¹¹¹ From this it would hardly be anticipated that the audience for talking films would be any larger than that for their silent counterparts. Yet the tax figures suggest that such was emphatically the case, to the extent that the coming of sound may almost be regarded as a second rebirth for cinema, resulting in an identifiably different product appealing to a substantially new audience, one which Rowson would enumerate, even if he did not recognize it as such, beginning in 1934.¹¹²

Notes

The author wishes to thank Professor Martin Chick, Dr. Jon Burrows, and an anonymous referee for their comments which assisted materially in clarifying the presentation here. They are in no way responsible for any surviving obscurities.

1. Gerben Bakker, *Entertainment Industrialised: The Emergence of the International Film Industry, 1890–1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 1; Richard Stone and D. A. Rowe, *The Measurement of Consumers' Expenditure and Behaviour in the United Kingdom, 1920–38*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), 91; and H. E. Browning and A. A. Sorrell, "Cinemas and Cinema-going in Great Britain," *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society*, ser. A, 117, no. 2 (1954): 135. All the figures relate to those activities subject to the entertainments tax and so do not comprehend all amusements.
2. The figure of 7.5 million was the preferred figure of the exhibitors' body, the Cinematograph Exhibitors' Association, or CEA, in 1922. Entertainments Tax (Part One), n.d., T 171/206, Budget and Finance Bill Papers, Chancellor of the Exchequer's Office, National Archives (hereafter TNA); *The Crushing Entertainments Tax: Some Brief Facts for Those Interested*, issued by the Cinema Tax Abolition Committee, n.d. The figure of 40 million, advanced by Financial Secretary to the Treasury, William Joynson-Hicks, in "No Remission," *Scotsman*, June 19, 1923, 5, was quickly acknowledged to have arisen from a misprint in the October 19, 1922, edition of the trade paper *The Cinema*; see "The Joynson-Hicks Letters," General Council, *Kinematograph Weekly*, September 20, 1923, 74.

3. "Amusement Taxes," *Stage*, April 6, 1916, 17; Henry B. Montgomery, "The New Taxes," *Kinematograph and Lantern Weekly*, April 13, 1916, 50; and "Minutes of Evidence: Statement of Mr. F. R. Goodwin," in *The Cinema, Its Present Position and Future Possibilities: Being the Report and Chief Evidence Taken by the Cinema Commission of Inquiry Instituted by the National Council of Public Morals* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1917), part 2, 2–3.
4. Kinematograph Finance, *Kinematograph and Lantern Weekly*, April 26, 1917, 35; Stroller in the Provinces, *Kinematograph and Lantern Weekly*, June 13, 1918, 51; W. Gavazzi King, letter to the editor, "The Entertainment Tax," *Scotsman*, August 29, 1923, 9.
5. "Money Lost to the Cinema: Bigger Film Public Needed," *Bioscope*, January 27, 1927, 22; and "Mr. Simon Rowson," obituary, *Times* (London), June 28, 1950, 8.
6. Simon Rowson, "The Value of Remittances Abroad for Cinematograph Films," *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society* 97 (1934): 638.
7. This is substantially the narrative outlined in Nicholas Hiley, "'Let's Go to the Pictures': The British Cinema Audience in the 1920s and 1930s," *Journal of Popular British Cinema* 2 (1999): 43.
8. *Kinematograph Year Book, Eighth Year*, 1921 (London: Kinematograph Publications, 1921), 502–22; and "The Closing Down Stories," *Bioscope*, August 3, 1916, 433.
9. "The History of the Entertainments Duty," CUST 153/1, 6, Entertainments Duty, vol. 1: Historical Memoranda, HM Customs and Excise, Entertainments Duty Records, TNA; and Amusement Tax: Draft Scheme, CUST 143/65, Entertainments Tax, vol. 6, Private Office Papers, Board of Customs and Excise and Predecessors, Parry Collection, TNA.
10. Jon Burrows, *The British Cinema Boom, 1909–1914: A Commercial History* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).
11. Rowson, "Value of Remittances Abroad," 636–38.
12. Amusement Tax: Draft Scheme, 1–4; and Draft Finance Bill, 27 March 1916, CUST 143/65, TNA.
13. General Order No. 37/1916, 29 May 1916, 1–2, CUST 143/65, TNA; The Entertainments Tax, *Stage*, April 13, 1916, 20; proposals by the West End Theatre Managers' Association, The Entertainments Tax, *Stage*, April 20, 1916, 22; "Budget Discussion," Parliament in Session, *Scotsman*, April 18, 1916, 5; "How the System Is Being Worked in Sheffield," Amusement Tax, *Sheffield Independent*, May 16, 1916, 5; "New Impost Well Received in Derby," The Amusement Tax, *Derby Daily Telegraph*, May 16, 1916, 3.
14. Entertainments Tax: Estimate of Yield for a Year on the Basis of Figures for Oct: Nov: Dec: 1916, T 172/495, TNA; Simon Rowson, "A Statistical Survey of the Cinema Industry in Great Britain in 1934," *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society* 99 (1936): 68; and Browning and Sorrell, "Cinemas and Cinema-going," 134.
15. 161 Parl. Deb. H.C. (5th ser.) (1923) col. 2117W; see also, 205 Parl. Deb. H.C. (5th ser.) (1927) cols. 1301–2W and 261 Parl. Deb. H.C. (5th ser.) (1932) col. 688W for further refusals.
16. Twenty-eighth Report of the Commissioners of His Majesty's Customs and Excise, 1937, Cmd. 5573, at 107.
17. 307 Parl. Deb. H.C. (5th ser.) (1935) col. 2153W.
18. Amounts paid on the basis of certified returns, CUST 143/65, TNA.
19. Stone and Rowe, *Measurement of Consumers' Expenditure*, 81.
20. Stone and Rowe, 81; Browning and Sorrell, "Cinemas and Cinema-going," 134.

21. Amounts paid on the basis of certified returns, CUST 143/65.
22. "History of the Entertainments Duty," 38–39, CUST 153/1, TNA; and "Theatre Admission by Chocolates: Reply to Cabarets," *Manchester Guardian*, November 11, 1924, 9.
23. Entertainments Tax, *Stage*, May 9, 1929, 19; it also formed part of the league's deputation to Snowden in 1930; see "The Tax: The Chancellor's Reply," *Kinematograph Weekly*, March 13, 1930, 33.
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25. "New Theatre to Show Talkies," *Observer*, May 11, 1930, 19; "Broadhead Theatres Turn 'Talkie,'" *Manchester Guardian*, March 29, 1930, 17, although the decision was subsequently reversed, "Talkies Boom Over? Scheme to Convert Theatres Cancelled," *Manchester Guardian*, July 18, 1930, 13.
26. 278 Parl. Deb. H.C. (5th ser.) (1933) cols. 2163–79; and 300 Parl. Deb. H.C. (5th ser.) (1935) col.1631. A similar policy was adopted in the Irish Free State starting in 1931; see Kevin Rockett with Emer Rockett, *Film Exhibition and Distribution in Ireland, 1909–2000* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2011), 131.
27. Based on cinema's share of certified returns as indicated by the returns collected by customs and excise in 1920–21.
28. See table 1: Amounts raised by entertainments tax, 1916–1939.
29. 237 Parl. Deb. H.C. (5th ser.) (1930) col. 2669; and "The Budget Speech: Mr Snowden Reveals His Plans," *Manchester Guardian*, April 15, 1930, 16.
30. "Only 600 Silent Cinemas," *Film Weekly*, December 6, 1930, 31.
31. 256 Parl. Deb. H.C. (5th ser.) (1931) col. 309.
32. Total ticket sales for seats priced 6d. and below were calculated from customs' estimates of the yield of tax at each price. Assuming that cinema accounted for 62.6 percent of the total, this would account for 58.8 percent of cinema ticket sales calculated for 1923–24.
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34. Accounts, Aberdeen Picture Palaces Ltd., Cinema Museum, Lambeth.
35. "The All-Conquering 'Talkies,'" *Bioscope*, January 8, 1930, 32.
36. "Yorks and Lancs [sic] Lead," *Kinematograph Weekly*, December 26, 1929, 21; "The Silent Market," CEA Proceedings, *Kinematograph Weekly*, May 29, 1930, 56; and "The Supply of Silents," *Kinematograph Weekly*, June 5, 1930, 39.
37. "Only 600 Silent Cinemas."
38. "The War as It Is Affecting the Exhibitor," *Bioscope*, August 13, 1914, 631.
39. Sunderland and Wearside Sidelights, *Bioscope*, April 29, 1915, 443; surveys of Southport and Blackpool indicated that both towns benefited from a significant troop presence, Snippets from Southport, *Bioscope*, November 26, 1914, 894; Blackpool Notes, *Bioscope*, December 17, 1914, 1265; Snippets from Southport, *Bioscope*, July 8, 1915, 167; Henry B. Montgomery cites the custom of soldiers as a factor in the trading success of one leading company (Provincial Cinematograph Theatres, Ltd., *Kinematograph and Lantern Weekly*, April 22, 1915, 53).
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41. Norwich Notes, *Kinematograph and Lantern Weekly*, October 7, 1915, 24.
42. Henry B. Montgomery, Provincial Cinematograph Theatres, Ltd., *Kinematograph and Lantern Weekly*, April 15, 1915, 61; Henry B. Montgomery, Reports of Company Meetings, *Kinematograph*

- and *Lantern Weekly*, May 20, 1915, 67; "Interesting Annual Meeting," *Bioscope*, April 22, 1915, 297; and for returns covering 164 companies, see Burrows, *British Cinema Boom*, 113.
43. Henry B. Montgomery, "The Survival of the Fittest," *Kinematograph and Lantern Weekly*, June 24, 1915, 43.
 44. W. Boyd-Dawkins, letter to the editor, "Paying for the War," *Manchester Guardian*, August 11, 1915, 10; letter to the editor, "One Who Looks On, Tax Amusements," *Globe*, December 10, 1915, 3; *Lichfield Mercury*, August 20, 1915, 2; Trade Topics, *Bioscope*, July 15, 1915, 234; see also 74 Parl. Deb. H.C. (5th ser.) (1915) col. 684.
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 50. "Manchester City's Profit," Football, *Manchester Guardian*, May 26, 1920, 4.
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 56. "Travelling Showmen Summoned at Preston," Entertainment Tax, *Lancashire Evening Post*, August 28, 1916, 2.
 57. Rowson, "Value of Remittances Abroad," 637–38; Rowson, "Statistical Survey," 69–70; and 256 Parl. Deb. H.C. (5th ser.) (1931) col. 309.
 58. Rowson, "Statistical Survey," 70; and Browning and Sorrell, "Cinemas and Cinema-going," 134.
 59. Custom House Paper, 6 March 1917, T 172/495, TNA; Estimate of Yield for a Year on the Basis of Figures for Oct: Nov: Dec: 1916; Table on Prices of Admission, CUST 143/61, Notes on Clauses, Entertainments Duty, Vol. 2: Tax Yield, Board of Customs and Excise, Private Office Papers, Parry Collection, TNA; and Draft Finance Bill, 27 March 1916, CUST 143/65.

60. "History of the Entertainments Duty," 67, Alteration of Scale of Duty, CUST 153/1, TNA; the delayed increase reduces the average price calculated for the year to just below 5d.
61. "History," 9–10, CUST 153/1; appendix, Alterations in the Scale Since the Imposition of the Duty, 87–89; 1924 figures calculated from Entertainments Duty, Basis of Estimates of Revised Scales, CUST 118/146, TNA.
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63. A. E. Newbould, 24 May 1918, 16.
64. "Raising Prices," Aberdeen, *Kinematograph Weekly*, August 7, 1919, 145; and "Admission Charges Raised," Aberdeen, *Kinematograph Weekly*, August 14, 1919, 79.
65. Directors' Minute Book, Meeting of Directors, Albion Cinema, North Shields, 8 October 1917, TH.AL/1/1, Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums (hereafter TWAM); Minutes, Meeting of Directors, 14 June 1920, TH.AL/1/2, TWAM; advertisement, Municipal Pictures, *Kirkintilloch Herald and Lenzie, Kilsyth, Campsie and Cumbernauld Press*, October 3, 1917, 4; and advertisement, Municipal Pictures, September 1, 1920, 4.
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67. "Talkies or Silence," Prices of Admission, *Kinematograph Weekly*, April 25, 1929, 36; "Sheffield's Keen Cutting," Admission Prices, *Kinematograph Weekly*, March 27, 1930, 42; reports of reduced prices extended from Glasgow, "Lower Prices," News from Scotland, *Kinematograph Weekly*, September 25, 1930, 49, to Exeter, "From All Quarters," *Kinematograph Weekly*, May 14, 1931, 79.
68. "Unfairness of the Tax," CEA Proceedings, *Kinematograph Weekly*, March 7, 1929, 45; and "Admission Charges," CEA Proceedings, March 28, 1929, 37–38.
69. Minutes, Meeting of Directors, Albion Cinema, 12 August 1929, TH.AL/1/3, TWAM; and Minutes, Meeting of Directors, 14 July 1930.
70. For instances of exhibitors declining to pass the tax on, see "A Tax Boycott?," *Kinematograph Weekly*, November 12, 1931, 48; for cases in which decisions to raise prices were quickly reversed, see "CEA Lead Demanded: Lowering Prices," and "The New Entertainments Tax," CEA Proceedings, *Kinematograph Weekly*, November 19, 1931, 47, 48.
71. Stone and Rowe, *Measurement of Consumers' Expenditure*, 91.
72. Company Meetings, Provincial Cinematograph Theatres, Ltd., *Manchester Guardian*, March 30, 1927, 19.
73. His initial figure of 963 million was later revised downward, as the number of seats sold through the stamp and ticket systems was found to have been overestimated. Rowson, "Statistical Survey," 70; and Browning and Sorrell, "Cinemas and Cinema-going," 134.
74. Calculated from Entertainments Tax: Estimate of Yield for a Year on the Basis of Figures for Oct: Nov: Dec: 1916, T 172/495, TNA.
75. Based on the return of £2,917,871 for the period from May 16, 1916, to the end of the tax year.

76. "A Grave Situation: Amend the Tax!," *Bioscope*, July 20, 1916, 185; the following week, the charge was renewed, "Dead Geese Can't Lay Eggs! Why the Tax Should Be Amended," *Bioscope*, July 27, 1916, 277.
77. Topics of the Week, *Bioscope*, July 13, 1916, 90; Henry B. Montgomery, "The Elimination of the Unfit," *Kinematograph and Lantern Weekly*, July 20, 1916, 92.
78. Montgomery, "Elimination of the Unfit."
79. Minutes, Meetings of Directors, Albion Cinema, 14 August 1916, TH.AL/1/1, TWAM; Round Lancashire Halls, *Kinematograph and Lantern Weekly*, July 6, 1916, 109; second houses in Liverpool were said to be affected by daylight saving time; "The 'Summer Time' Hours," *Bioscope*, May 25, 1916, 917; "The Two Evils," *Bioscope*, June 1.1916, 1033; "The Lean Days Are Here!," *Bioscope*, October 26, 1916, 341.
80. Entertainments Tax, Postponement of Increased Rates of Tax, Circular to Collectors and Surveyors, June 1917, CUST 143/6122, TNA; 94 Parl. Deb. H.C. (5th ser.) (1917) cols. 1972–73.
81. "The Entertainments Tax," *Era*, November 7, 1917, 11–12; "The Entertainments Tax—Continued," *Era*, November 14, 1917, 11–12; "The Entertainments Tax: Summary of the Amazing Evidence Collected by 'The Era,'" *Era*, November 21, 1917, 11; and "The Entertainments Tax," *The Era Annual*, 1918, 31.
82. Defence against a possible attack on the grounds of injuring the Trade, 19 April 1918, T 172/845, Entertainments Tax, TNA.
83. Report suggesting increase of Duty, March–April 1917, par.1, CUST 143/61, TNA; Scheme for Co-operation of Local or Police Authorities, 13 July 1917, General Order No.45/1917, Entertainments Tax, TNA; and Defence against a possible attack, 19 April 1918, par. 1.
84. Defence, Report of Proprietors of Places of Entertainment, 19 April 1918, T 172/845, TNA.
85. Estimates of Yield of Tax, CUST 143/61, TNA. The final figure for 1917–18 saw an upturn of over £1.5 million.
86. Even the figure for 1917–18 of 10.4 million admissions a week was between 30 and 49 percent above prewar estimates of 7 to 8 million. See Rachael Low, *The History of the British Film, 1906–1914* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1949), 25.
87. Company accounts were presented according to their date of formation. Company Meetings, Provincial Cinematograph Theatres, Ltd, *Manchester Guardian*, April 20, 1921, 10.
88. "B.B. Pictures Profit," *Scottish News*, *Kinematograph Weekly*, January 6, 1921, 205; and Granitewtown Gossip, *Entertainer and Scottish Kinema Record*, April 17, 1920, 14.
89. Jutetown Jottings, *Scottish Kinema Record*, October 30, 1920, 13.
90. Figures for year to 26 January 1918, Private Ledger, Albion Cinema, TH.AL/4/1, TWAM; and figures for year to 29 January 1921, Private Ledger, Albion Cinema, TH.AL/4/1, TWAM.
91. Deputation from the Cinematograph Exhibitors' Association, 7, T 172/845, TNA.
92. Private Ledger, Albion Cinema, TH.AL/4/1; Balance Sheets, 21 March 1921 and 21 March 1924, 28, BT2/851625, Dunfermline Cinema House Ltd, National Records of Scotland, Edinburgh.
93. See table 5.
94. "The Inexhaustible Public," It Seems to Us, *Kinematograph Weekly*, September 26, 1929, 18.
95. "Bigger and Better," It Seems to Us, *Kinematograph Weekly*, October 9, 1930, 19.
96. "Rowson Optimistic of Trade's Future: Analysis," *Kinematograph Weekly*, December 11, 1930, 38.
97. "New Tax Remission Campaign," *Kinematograph Weekly*, March, 10, 1932, 33; and "Facts for the Chancellor," *Kinematograph Weekly*, March 24, 1932, 35.

98. See table 5.
99. W. H. Fuller, general secretary of CEA, to Rt. Hon. Philip Snowden, 22 January 1931, CUST 118/305, Entertainments Duty, 1931, Private Office papers, Board of Customs and Excise, TNA; "The Slump in Cinema," *Manchester Guardian*, March 10, 1932, 8; and "The Tax: CEA Suggestions," *Kinematograph Weekly*, March 10, 1932, 66.
100. "The Drain of the Tax," CEA Proceedings, *Kinematograph Weekly*, January 28, 1932, 37; "Tax Killing Takings," CEA Proceedings, *Kinematograph Weekly* February 25, 1932, 26; "Cinemas Demand Tax Cut," *Courier and Argus* (Dundee), March 17, 1932, 11; and 266 Parl. Deb. H.C. (5th ser.) (1932) col. 632.
101. "Burden of the Cinema Tax: Large Decreases in Attendance," *Manchester Guardian*, April 6, 1932, 11; for estimates of the impact on receipts overall, see Entertainments Tax, *Kinematograph Weekly*, June 2, 1932, 20.
102. "Tax Fight Hindered by Apathy," *Kinematograph Weekly*, January 18, 1934, 8; and "S. Mids. [sic] Members Ignore Tax Returns," *Kinematograph Weekly*, February 1, 1934, 8.
103. Facts for the Chancellor, 35.
104. See table 5.
105. "Intensified Campaign for Tax Relief," *Kinematograph Weekly*, May 3, 1934, 11.
106. 256 Parl. Deb. H.C. (5th ser.) (1931) col. 309; and 300 Parl. Deb. H.C. (5th ser.) (1935) cols. 1631–32.
107. Trevor Griffiths, *The Cinema and Cinema-going in Scotland, 1896–1950* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 185–90.
108. Stone and Rowe, *Measurement of Consumers' Expenditure*, 91, 110. Expressed in constant prices (1938=100), growth in expenditure was more marked at 33.3 percent.
109. "The History of the Entertainments Duty," 6.
110. Alan John Percivale Taylor, *English History, 1914–1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), 313.
111. Griffiths, *Cinema and Cinema-going*, 181–83.
112. The idea of a second rebirth goes somewhat against the idea proposed in Andre Gaudreault and Philippe Marion, "A Medium Is Always Born Twice . . .," *Early Popular Visual Culture* 3 (2005): 3–15.

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